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DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

TITLE: Utopia and Communism – From Philosophical Idea to Political Practice

Case Study: Communism in Romania

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Introduction

This paper aims to illustrate the trajectory of the totalitarian system from its philosophical conception to its implementation in the 20th century. To trace this trajectory, we have selected several authors who seemed relevant in addressing the key aspects of the two central concepts: utopia and communism. In addition to these main concepts, secondary ones have also been developed, without which the coherence of the thesis would have suffered.

Thus, we analyzed the meaning of ideologies, the characteristics of dystopias, the pre-Marx ideas that can be associated with utopian socialism, the essence of Marxism extracted from some of the most significant writings of Marx and Engels, and, finally, the perspectives of communism's critics. The entire approach culminated in an analysis of communist practice, with the case study focusing on communism in Romania, aiming to uncover the specific features of Romanian communist ideology.

Research Methodology

The methods used were, on one hand, the intrinsic analysis of the guiding ideas of each author's theory, as well as the extrinsic analysis of the events that followed the application of various theories. Additionally, historical research methods were employed, along with the study of documents that led us to conclusions regarding how the Romanian communist ideology is extracted from the entire body of communist theories. With the help of this last method, we were

able to identify the specific elements of communism in Romania before 1989, which can be considered a variant of Marxism-Leninism.

Along with the methods mentioned above, we also used hermeneutic research methods to correctly understand the socio-historical context of the ideas followed throughout the paper, to which we sought to give coherence in order to achieve the final goal of the thesis: discovering the trajectory of communism from its inception—throughout history—to practice.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the transition from the theory of communist ideology to its practical application, which often took a radically different form from the initial concepts. We aim to understand which theoretical elements captivated the masses and led them to accept a system that, in reality, deviated significantly from its original ideals.

A secondary, yet essential, objective is to investigate the influence of the past on the present, by analyzing how the ideas underlying left-wing totalitarianism evolved and were reflected in society. Through the case study based on historical methods, we have described specific events and facts from the communist period in Romania to understand the mechanisms through which this ideology was accepted and implemented. This approach allows us to assess the extent to which communism continues to exert some fascination on new generations and to identify potential ways to prevent a resurgence, even if in a form different from that known in the 20th century.

Structure of the Chapters

I began my thesis with a chapter dedicated to conceptual clarifications—the ideas of utopia, dystopia, ideology, and communism. Conceptual clarifications are necessary to understand the exact meanings of the terms we are using so that we can contextualize events as accurately as possible. Thus, the central ideas of this work—utopia, dystopia, ideology, and communism—were defined from the outset.

I differentiated between utopia/dystopia as literary genres and the socio-political regimes that emerged as a result of applying ideas drawn from the writings of utopian/dystopian authors. Then, I highlighted the differences between what communism means and its milder variations,

such as social democracy. Additionally, I examined what utopia looks like from a theoretical perspective, doing so by analyzing the ideas of Wunenburger, who sees utopia as an essential instrument of the imagination, capable of projecting ideal models of society but also of generating risks when these visions become rigid and totalitarian. He emphasizes that utopia should not be viewed merely as an unrealizable fantasy but also as a factor stimulating critical thinking and social progress.

Subsequently, in the third chapter, titled *From the History of Utopian and Dystopian Ideas* I examined various authors whose works revolve around the concept of utopia. This included both creators of utopian visions, such as Thomas More, and authors of dystopian narratives, such as George Orwell.

Although the term *utopia* originates with Thomas More, utopian ideas can be found long before his time. In this paper, we focused on the utopian ideas in Plato's writings, where he also structures an ideal society – the Ideal City. Then, we examined utopia from multiple perspectives. First, we wanted to see what utopia looks like in theory. That is, what utopia means from a theoretical standpoint, and to do this, we turned to J.J. Wunenburger, who addresses utopia and the imaginary, placing them in a distinct context from which we understand how the two affect reality or the way certain inventions—such as the clock, the calendar, etc.—have contributed to limiting human actions, bringing them very close to the atmosphere found in utopian creators' works.

Next, we studied Plato and More, also referring to other utopian works found throughout literature. We compared what utopia means for Plato—who aimed to show what the best possible world would be, rather than creating a political program—with how utopia appears in More's work, and, at times, we examined what aspects of utopian theory were adopted by communist ideology.

Furthermore, we found it useful to view utopia from the perspective of its opposite, dystopia, to observe whether totalitarian regimes are perhaps more dystopian than utopian. Furthermore, we found it useful to view utopia from its opposite perspective, dystopia, to observe whether totalitarian regimes are more dystopian than utopian. We discovered that totalitarianism was very well described by Orwell in his novels *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Orwell explains that his works were inspired by the regimes that were just establishing themselves in Eastern Europe, which is also the reason he struggled for a long time to find a publisher, as Western countries did not want to upset the Soviet Union.

We deemed it appropriate to also examine the characteristics of another theory with a utopian inclination. We chose Rawls's concept of a realistic utopia, which, through the Veil of Ignorance and the Original Position, presents an almost perfect society where no one subjugates another, and where all individuals consider the well-being of others as if it were their own. After analyzing the two central concepts of Rawls's theory, we concluded that the realist-utopian framework could be applied in a newly formed society of smaller dimensions. However, the likelihood of implementing Rawls's theory in an already established society is minimal.

Chapter Four, *The Philosophical Foundations of Communism*, aims to address the subject of communism in detail, examining it as a species of totalitarianism and beyond. We sought to understand the trajectory of communist ideas and how they evolved from the works of several 19th-century utopian socialists. In the writings of authors such as Gracchus Babeuf, the Count de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, we identified elements that influenced later communist thought. The concepts of collective property, the just organization of society, and the elimination of social inequalities are among the socialist ideas that preceded Marxist thought. Although the visions of utopian socialists were often deemed unrealizable, they laid the groundwork for fundamental concepts that were later adopted and developed by Marx and Engels.

In short, Babeuf was one of the first thinkers to propose the idea of a communist society based on absolute equality, and the *Conspiracy of Equals* during the French Revolution anticipated the concept of class struggle, which Marx later theorized. Then, de Saint-Simon Count advocated for the idea of a society organized on rational foundations and led by industrialists and prominent individuals, rather than the aristocracy. His idea of a classless society was later adopted by socialists. Robert Owen was one of the socialists who experimented with models of cooperative communities, such as those in New Lanark in Scotland and New Harmony in the USA. Thus, he demonstrated that organizing production collectively could improve workers' conditions, providing a foundation for the future economic organization of communism. Lastly, Fourier proposed the creation of self-sufficient communities where people lived and worked in harmony, called *phalansteries*. His idea of social organization based on cooperation decisively influenced later socialist and communist movements. Marx and Engels appreciated the contributions of utopian socialists; however, their most important criticism was the excess of idealism and the lack of a materialist analysis of history. Therefore, Marx formulated historical

materialism, emphasizing that social change must occur through class struggle, not through utopian social experiments.

The following subsection in Part Four is dedicated to Marxism. Evaluated both from a philosophical-political and economic perspective, Marxist theory has been analyzed to identify elements borrowed from previous thinkers, as well as to finalize the purpose of the work: tracing the path that the philosophical idea followed until it became political practice. Thus, Marx developed the theory that this transformation is based on dialectical and historical materialism, stating that the history of humankind is determined by the class struggle between the exploited and the exploiters, and that the capitalist system is responsible for the appropriation of surplus value by capitalists, to the detriment of the workers who create that surplus value, thus maintaining social inequality. Marx believed that this would lead to the proletarian revolution, which would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and overthrow the bourgeoisie. These would be mere transitional stages toward communism, in which the means of production would be collectively owned, and private property would be abolished. If all these conditions are met, the state—seen as an instrument of the dominant class—will become unnecessary and will disappear once society becomes classless, based on equality and cooperation.

Thus, the aim of this section was to identify the main ideas that gave rise to communist theory, both in Marx and in the 19th-century utopian socialists who are considered the precursors of communism.

The fifth chapter, *Critical Assessments of Communism - The Philosophical-Political Dimension*, aims to provide balance and an important critical perspective on communism and totalitarianism. The two authors we focus on, Karl Popper and Hannah Arendt, are among the most prominent thinkers when it comes to criticizing any forms of totalitarianism. On the one hand, Popper, particularly in his work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, associates communism with a form of historicism, a doctrine which claims that the laws of history can be predicted. Popper argues that any form of historicism leads to dictatorship, as it provides justification for any violent actions, for example, by claiming that historical evolution is conditioned by it. Here, we highlight the dangers of political utopias and how Marxism was used to justify oppressive regimes. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt analyzes both Soviet communism and Nazism, considering them two faces of modern totalitarianism. She shows how the reinterpretation of Marxism by Lenin and Stalin led to oppressive regimes. The section dedicated to Hannah Arendt emphasizes the mechanisms by which communism transformed into a totalitarian regime, despite its original intentions of liberating the working class.

This section of the thesis, dedicated to the critique of totalitarianism, provided balance to the doctoral research, as mentioned, by highlighting the practical consequences and fundamental critiques of this type of political regime, making a significant contribution to the historical clarification of the events.

The final chapter, *Case Study: Romanian Communism*, aims to analyze the main events that took place in Romania in the 20th century, following the end of World War II.

The purpose of this final section is to identify the elements that modified the theoretical idea of communism, transforming it into communist political practice. Moreover, we have identified how the Romanian communist ideology diverged from the original regime. Thus, our contribution to the development of this field of political philosophy is to emphasize the idea that there exists a distinct species of communist politics, namely Romanian communist ideology. Its specificity can be summarized as follows: inspired by Marxism-Leninism, like all ideologies that governed countries in the former communist bloc, Romanian communist ideology evolved in a specific direction, with major nationalist influences, as well as a break from Moscow's influence under Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Thus, Marxism-Leninism with nationalist accents was the first characteristic we could identify, as initially the Romanian Communist Party was completely subordinated to the USSR, but after Ceaușescu came to power, the focus shifted to national sovereignty. Therefore, the term *national-communism* could accurately encompass some of the characteristics of Romanian communist ideology.

Another element was the cult of personality, which was massively developed first around the leader, and then extended to his wife as well. The authoritarian regime based on the glorification of the leader and his family was a feature that distinguished Romanian communism from other similar regimes.

The third element that set Romanian communist ideology apart from other communist ideologies was Ceaușescu's desire for Romania to become an independent country. Thus, economic autarky, driven by the desire to fully pay off the country's external debt, led to severe shortages for the population.

The heightened political repression, coordinated by the Securitate, is an element that surpassed in violence other similar regimes. Therefore, one of the subsections of the case study is dedicated to the abuses of the communist dictatorship in our country, and it highlights one of the most important characteristics of Romanian communist ideology.

Compared to other European states, Romania refused to implement the reforms promoted by Gorbachev – *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* – towards the end of the existence of the Soviet Bloc, remaining a rigid regime until the very end.

Therefore, Romanian communism was a unique blend of Marxism-Leninism, personal dictatorship, and national sovereignty.

Conclusions

Finally, we conclude by drawing a few brief conclusions that encompass the essence of this research. Firstly, we can observe that the development of one of the most severe political regimes – 20th-century communism – had deep roots. It did not arise solely as a reaction to the writings of one person (Marx), but resulted from a complex process in which ideas branched out and evolved on multiple levels of thought. Ideology as utopia and the exaggerated desire to implement it in practice gave birth to a political project that not only failed to fulfill the theory but even overturned it.

If we perceive communism as a continuously developing, modifying, and adapting organism, we can compare it to what Julian Baggini describes in his theory known as the *Pearl Theory*. He states that "despite the way our lives transform over time, there is an essence of the 'self' that remains unchanged. This self is endowed with free will and can even transcend the body beyond death. However, despite extensive research, neuroscience has not discovered such a pearl – the fundamental 'self' is not located anywhere in the brain. Instead, certain brain systems function simultaneously to create the sensation that we are unique and in control." Humans, in this view, possess an "autobiographical self."[1]

Similarly, communism can be seen as an ever-changing organism that adapts to the historical reality in which it unfolds. This perspective allows us to identify, for instance, a specific variant of Eastern European communism—Romanian communist ideology. Moreover, this framework explains why, more than three decades after the fall of communism in Europe, remnants of its influence persist, particularly in former communist states.

Although subtle, these influences remain visible and manifest across various domains, from mentality and political culture to the economy, administration, and education. Bureaucratic

[1] [1] *Vide* Julian Baggini, *The Ego Trick: In Search Of The Self*, Granta Books, Londra, 2011.

inefficiency and corruption are among the most prominent remnants, exerting a significant impact on democracy in former communist countries.

At the societal level, a segment of the population still exhibits a lack of individual initiative, with a persistent tendency to rely on external solutions—primarily from the state.

Thus, communism can be understood as an evolving organism, continuously adapting to new times. While the likelihood of communist regimes resembling those of the 20th century is low, new forms of authoritarian or totalitarian political regimes can emerge at any moment, built upon the foundation of a fragile democracy.

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